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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3232
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1253
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000087

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DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2019
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SUBJECT: NAKHCHIVAN: A WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

REF: BAKU 0021

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Robert Garverick, Reasons 1
.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 27 Poloff visited the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (AR) along with Claire Delessard, the Political Advisor to the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus. Nakhchivan is the ancestral home of late president Heydar Aliyev, and has been run essentially as a fiefdom by Vasif Talibov for decades. After meetings with villagers imprisoned without cause, reporters attacked while trying to report, lawyers who are constantly monitored, opposition party members afraid to collect signatures for a petition, and government officials who did not care about any of this, poloff concludes that Nakhchivan is a world upside down. End Summary.

Village of the Damned

¶2. (C) Poloff began the visit with a trip to the village of Heydarabad in the Sardarak district of Nakhchivan, which is the northernmost district in the AR, and connects the AR to Turkey. Despite being the largest village of the district, when arriving in town poloff saw almost no people, a trend that continued throughout the visit. Poloff visited the home of Ismayil Huseynov, who had been thrown in a mental institution after complaining about the treatment of his son in a detention facility (reftel). After an initial hesitation about letting the visitors into the home, Huseynov, his wife Khanimzar and son Elvin (who is also disabled) told the long story of their troubles with the Nakhchivani authorities.

¶3. (C) While it was hard to discern the exact chronology of the story, it seems the Huseynovs' main problem was not the incident of the New Year's tree (reftel), but actually a complaint letter Ismayil had written to the local ExCom and to First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva asking for a larger house so that his children from his first marriage could come back to Nakhchivan to live with him. After receiving this letter, the ExCom invited Ismayil and Khanimzar to a meeting which apparently escalated until the ExCom threw a chair at Ismayil, and he protected himself with his walking stick. After this incident, the couple was taken to detention at Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) headquarters in Nakhchivan City, and then Ismayil was transferred to mental institution and held for 13 days without contact with his family. Ismayil wept as he described the conditions in the mental

institution. Upon his release he was told by the local police to divorce his wife, as she was a distant relative of an "opposition member" (Hakimeldostu Mehdiyev of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety). Khamzard confirmed that Mehdiyev is a relative, but she had not seen him for years until this incident occurred.

Lawyers Taking Small Steps

14. (C) Next poloff met with Tural Huseynov, head of the newly created Nakhchivan Bar Association and leader of the USAID-funded legal resource centers in Nakhchivan. This meeting took place, at Tural's request, in the office of the provost of Nakhchivan State University. During the meeting the provost said nothing but simply monitored what Tural said. Tural explained the high level of cooperation the University has with the American Bar Association program in Baku, and that a number of ABA trainings have been incorporated into the University's curriculum. Tural was also grateful for the literature on human rights law that ABA gave the legal centers. These legal centers are staffed by third and fourth year law students, and see two to three cases per month. Despite this small number, Tural believes they are helping to increase confidence in the legal system, and more people are using lawyers to defend their rights.

Reporters Attacked

15. (C) In a meeting at the Nakhchivan Resource Center, an

BAKU 00000087 002 OF 003

NGO, Ilgar and Malahat Nasibov (reporters for Radio Liberty and Turan News Agency), and Elman Abbasov and Hakimeldostu Mehdiyev (Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety) discussed a number of ongoing human rights cases in Nakhchivan. The common theme of these cases is that the citizen involved sent a complaint letter to someone outside of Nakhchivan (often the First Lady or the Prosecutor General). Malahat explained that the post office opens letters and then notifies the Ministry of Internal Affairs about any complaint letters it finds. The reporters also explained that they are often attacked when they travel somewhere to get details of a story, and without the protection of the international community, they would probably be killed. (Note: after the visit Nasibova and Abbasov began to receive death threats over the telephone).

Opposition Quiet

16. (C) After the 2005 parliamentary elections, many opposition parties halted activities in Nakhchivan. Poloff met with the only active opposition representatives left: Faig Aliyev (Umid Party) and Meydan Alioglu (Musavat Party). Alioglu explained that Musavat decided not to collect signatures for its referendum lobbying group in Nakhchivan because it was too dangerous, citing an incident during the presidential campaign when the authorities searched all of his baggage for signature sheets upon his return from Baku. Aliyev, however, did collect 400 signatures for the Umid Party's group, but he claimed he was only able to do so by being very discreet. Aliyev said he was worried about increased Iranian influence in the region, and asked for more Western attention. Alioglu agreed, saying the population no longer supports the ruling regime and is looking elsewhere for support. The party members also estimated that of the 400,000 people who supposedly live in Nakhchivan, only 75,000 are left in the AR.

HR Ombudswoman Sees No Human Rights Violations

17. (C) Ulkar Bayramova, who has been the Human Rights Ombudswoman in Nakhchivan since the position was created in

2006, described her role as that of educating people on their rights and responsibilities. She says when citizens complain to her, they are usually hiding information which shows that their rights have not been violated, but that their personal interests have been. She has 22 employees on her staff, divided into several departments. When asked for an example of when she or anyone on her staff had received a complaint of a legitimate human rights violation, she told a story of a family who complained about abuses at a military recruitment center, but Bayramova's investigation "proved" that the family complained only because they did not want their son to join the army. When asked again for a real violation, she replied that she would have to research the question.

18. (C) When asked about the Huseynov case in Sardarak, Bayramova replied that she had no information directly from the family, but that her investigation showed that the problem was Huseynov's complaint about his house. She said that Huseynov threatened the ExCom with a stick, and that this was the reason for his hospitalization. Bayramova claimed, despite at first saying she had no information from the local authorities, that she had looked at all the documentation in the case and everything was legal.

MFA Laughs at Concerns of International Organizations

19. (C) Poloff then met with Ali Alizade, head of the delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nakhchivan. (Note: Nakhchivan, as an autonomous republic, has its own ministries for everything except Foreign Affairs and Defense, as well as its own parliament and Supreme Court. End Note.) In response to the Huseynov case, Alizade asserted that Huseynov's wife is related to the opposition, and the opposition paid her to create an incident and report it to the international community. Alizade added that every time the international community researches one of these incidents it is good for the opposition, not the ruling party. He

BAKU 00000087 003 OF 003

stated that this whole story was "not worth the time of the six people sitting around the table." Alizade then ended the meeting with a long speech stating that everything is great in every sector in Nakhchivan: large economic growth; access to all media; and a good judicial system. Alizade also boasted of the recently started flights to Istanbul from Nakhchivan. (Note: in a separate meeting Turkish Embassy second secretary Omer Murat told poloff that negotiations to begin these flights were difficult, and in the end Turkish Airlines conceded to some bizarre demands from the Nakhchivani authorities. End note.)

Comment

110. (C) Nakhchivan is both geographically and bureaucratically separated from the rest of Azerbaijan. With little economic activity other than agriculture, large segments of its population have fled to Baku or other countries. For those who remain, the government's reach is suffocating. Those in power seem to have little interest in improving the lives of their constituents, and try to muzzle those who ask for more. The Embassy will continue to monitor the volatile situation in Azerbaijan's upside down Autonomous Republic.

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